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ABSTRACT

The data for this paper are taken mainly from a longitudinal study of the college graduating class of 1961. Based on a subsample of earlier respondents, this study was primarily concerned with the graduates' evaluation of his college, his opinions on the goals of higher education in general, his opinions on the financing of higher education, and his plans for his children's college education. Questionnaires were received from 4,868 of the 6,005 persons in the subsample, for a response rate of 81%. The questionnaire included items on political attitudes and orientations. The questions that concern this paper were part of a battery tapping support for student and black militancy, and views on draft deferments for students. Results include the following: students in humanities were likely to support protests; and father's education is one of the strongest early determinants of support for militancy. There is a possibility that studies such as this can be used to predict to a college which applicants will engage in protest and the use of such a study to prevent the admission of such applicants. However, it is the very characteristics that support dissent that colleges are looking for in potential students. Therefore, colleges are unlikely to deny admission to bright children from well-educated families or students who are likely to go on to graduate school for the reasons that they may support activism while at school. (Author/PG)

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ALUMNI REACTIONS TO COLLEGE STUDENT PROTEST[1]

by

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NATIONAL OPINION RESEARCH CENTER

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The popular conception of the present militant movements among students is that militancy represents a dramatic change from previous years. The 1950's are thought of as a decade of apathy, conformism, and the organization man. Serious social science must, however, be more than a little skeptical of such a dramatic revolution. Clearly there are many students today who have little sympathy for the protesters; 60 per cent of the incoming college freshmen in 1969 said that college officials have been too lax in dealing with student protests on campus.[2] The Gallup Poll found in late 1969 that half the students in the country support the Republican Administration's Viet Nam policy.[3]

However, there is less evidence to support the notion that the students of a decade ago were not so apathetic as the popular stereotype would have us believe. Recent research at the National Opinion Research Center would indicate that although the graduates of 1961 have not been actively engaged in protest activity themselves (only 5 per cent had participated in an anti-war protest, only 1 per cent considered themselves "New Left," and only 9 per cent had engaged in a civil rights protest), they were still able to show some considerable sympathy for protest movements. As of June, 1968, 15 per cent would approve of their childrens participating in an anti-war protest, and 30 per cent would approve of their participation in a civil rights protest. Furthermore, approximately half of the alumni indicated general sympathy with both the student and black movements.

Alumni are more supportive of student protest than is the general public, but this is largely the result of the lower educational

level of the populace. In the white population, support for protests is virtually limited to persons who have themselves attended college. The same is not true of blacks, who are more likely to support student protests in general and at every educational level. Greater education produces greater tolerance among blacks as well as among whites.[4]

It is a reasonable hypothesis that college alumni who support student dissent will resemble the student dissenters. Research findings yield a rather consistent picture of the students who engage in demonstrations. They are likely to be Jewish and to come from upper-middle-class homes whose political values are liberal if not radical. In addition, they tend to be bright, to get good grades, and to major in "intellectual" fields such as the humanities and the social sciences.[5]

The data for this paper are taken mainly from the fifth wave of NORC's longitudinal study of the college graduating class of 1961. Based on a subsample of earlier respondents, this wave was primarily concerned with the graduate's evaluation of his college, his opinions on the goals of higher education in general, his opinions on the financing of higher education, and his plans for his children's college education. Questionnaires were received from 4,868 of the 6,005 persons in the subsample, for a response rate of 81 per cent. The questionnaire included items on political attitudes and orientations.

The questions that will concern us here were part of a battery tapping support for student and black militancy, views on draft deferments for students, and attitudes toward the role of technology and expertise in modern society. The last is not discussed in this paper.

Gammas between these items were computed,[6] and a quick and dirty factor analysis was performed.[7] Table 1 lists the items in an index of support for militancy. To each, respondents could agree or disagree, strongly or somewhat. The percentages refer to support for the militant position as indicated by agreement or disagreement with the specific item.

Note that the items refer to two aspects of militancy--student protests and Negro militancy. The two are put together because they are highly correlated. The mean of the fifteen different gammas between the six items is .54. It was not possible to distinguish a black from a student dimension. Though this paper is labeled as an analysis of support for student protests, the actual dependent variable includes support for black militancy as well. There is no reason to believe that separating out the items referring to students would have produced different results. The dependent variable is a score on an index that measures support for militancy. This measure has a range from 0 to 18 and a mean of 9.

Table 2 contains most of the independent variables to be analyzed below and gives their correlation with the index of support for militancy. Included are counterparts of many of the variables referred to in the literature on student protesters. The variables are presented in a rough temporal ordering, starting with family background and ending with enrollment in graduate school. In the analysis to follow, this ordering will be taken into account.

As correlation coefficients go, none of these is very large, though they do tend to confirm the idea that supporters of student

protests from the apathetic generation are rather similar to the protesters of the activist generation. The supporters tend to come from well-educated and affluent families. They also tend to be Jewish and from large urban areas. As in the general population, being young is related to support for protests. In other words, alumni who went through college "on schedule" are most likely to be sympathetic to protests. Those who had spent some time in the "real world" before graduation are less likely to be sympathetic.

It was not possible to use a "pure" measure of intellectual ability for this paper, but the last three variables in Table 2 indicate that it is the bright graduates who are likely to support student protests. The measure of college quality used here is Astin's "selectivity."[8]

In addition to the variables mentioned above, we shall look at one other characteristic--career field. The same question was used at two time periods--the senior year (1961) and 1968. It asked about a person's long-range career field. Respondents chose the field closest to their intentions from a list of about 100 that included the major professions, business, education, and the traditional arts and sciences.

As Table 3 shows, persons who intended to make a career in the humanities were very likely to support protests. They are followed in this regard by prospective social scientists and lawyers. At the bottom of the list are persons interested in health fields other than medicine, prospective engineers, and businessmen, with school teachers (the career field of education) somewhat above them. These results are consistent with studies of the militants themselves. Though the percentages look

rather impressive, the correlation between being in the humanities in 1968 and supporting protests is .18, and that between being in engineering and support for protests is -.09. The data for the senior year are consistent with those for 1968, with the latter being a somewhat stronger predictor.

The bulk of the analysis of support for militancy will be carried out with multiple regression techniques, using dummy variables where necessary. Since none of the correlations between the dependent variable and the independent variables is large, the results will necessarily be rather disappointing. We shall have some substantive remarks to make on this point later. To get a rough idea of how this analysis compares with the more usual procedures of looking at percentage differences, we can turn to Table 4, which is a traditional percentage table relating age and college quality to militancy. By ordinary survey standards, the results are respectable enough. Both variables are clearly important. The row and column differences are such that, by ordinary standards, we have a "finding." In fact, the two variables together explain 6 per cent of the variance, when they are treated as quantitative and not collapsed.

As we pointed out earlier, the independent variables will be handled in a rough time ordering, starting with characteristics associated with the person's family background. Additional variables are then added, generally according to the order of their occurrence in a person's educational career.

The entire analysis is contained in Table 5, which is, for a variety of reasons, a rather unusual table. The independent variables define the rows, and four coefficients define the columns. In the first

column is the standardized net regression weight, or beta. In the second is the coefficient of determination (R^2) associated with a given set of variables. In the third is the increment in R^2 brought about by adding a given set of variables. The fourth column gives the multiple correlation coefficient itself.

The first five variables were considered to be contemporaneous and were entered simultaneously. The effects of each are given net of the other four in the set. When the first of the additional variables, college quality, is introduced, its beta is given net of the five earlier variables. Since it would be inappropriate to partial out the effects of later variables on earlier ones, the coefficients of the first five variables do not include controls for later ones. Except for the first five, the effects of a variable are given net of all variables listed above it in the table but net of none of those falling below it.

To begin, then, the first column of Table 5 shows that father's education is one of the strongest early determinants of support for militancy and that parental family income is a quite weak determinant. Age and religion are nearly as strong as father's education. Jews are more likely to support dissent than are Gentiles, and the younger graduates are more likely to be tolerant than the older. We should remember that in this sample age varies but year of graduation does not. The older graduates had undoubtedly spent some period of time away from the campus. Their exposure to campus culture was more intermittent and perhaps less intensive than that of the younger graduates, who had gone straight on through from high school. Hometown size

is a relatively unimportant variable, as its beta of .07 indicates. The size of the sample (nearly 5,000 cases) makes this coefficient statistically significant; it is nearly five times as large as its standard error. All five initial variables explain only 6 per cent of the variance in support for student militancy.

Student protest has by no means been limited to academically prestigious, well-known campuses, but its incidence has been greater in such places than in the more obscure ones. Hence, we should not be surprised to find a positive correlation between college quality and student militancy. Showing that we can expect the same thing with regard to alumni tolerance for dissent requires a little further discussion.

In this sample of graduates, support for militancy is negatively related to the existence of a protest at one's alma mater.[9] At the same time, college quality and support for dissent are positively related. It was unfortunately not possible to include the presence or absence of protest on campus as a variable in this analysis. But the pattern of correlations reported above guarantees that we are not overestimating the effects of college quality. If the better campuses had not been more likely to experience protests, their 1951 alumni would have been even more favorable to protests than they actually were. As it is, college quality, with a beta of .18, adds 3 per cent to the proportion of the variance explained.

Grades do nearly as well with a beta of .16. Two explanations of the effects of these last two variables come to mind. One would ascribe the college-quality effect to a value climate supportive of

dissent and more likely to prevail on the better campuses. The grade effect would be taken to indicate that academically oriented behavior that was rewarded on a given campus was associated with tolerance for dissent. The alternative explanation would simply note that intellectual ability is not controlled and say that the two variables together are a reasonably good substitute. We want to adopt the second approach here, but it should be clear that the only way to decide the issue would be with a measure of intellectual ability.

Assuming that college quality and grades do provide an effective control for ability, we must search for a different interpretation of graduate enrollment. The one that comes to mind is that this variable may represent exposure to student protests and protesters. Such exposure to the perspective of the dissenters may produce sympathy for dissent in much the same way that exposure to members of minority ethnic groups produces tolerance.

Finally, we may turn to the data on career field. None of the coefficients for single fields is very large, so the increments in R^2 are given without the detailed data for each field. This allows us to look at the effects of field as a single "variable." Each field question adds about as much information as do the other variables already in the model. Net of the other variables, humanists tend to be high on support of protests and engineers and businessmen tend to be low, with coefficients for the other fields generally falling in between the two extremes. With all variables taken into account, 18 per cent of the variance is explained. This is the same as a multiple correlation of .42.

We are now in a position to speculate on a practical problem that has received considerable attention lately: the possibility that studies such as this can be used to predict which applicants to a college will engage in protest and the use of such a study to prevent the admission of such people. If we assume that findings on support for protests yield fairly accurate clues to actual protest behavior, it seems clear that an admissions procedure geared to these clues would be largely futile and completely foolish.

The futility comes about from the fact that data of this kind do not "work" as accurate predictors of individual behavior. If college quality and grades are taken as surrogates for ability, the kind of information available to an admissions officer explains about 10 per cent of the variance, leaving 90 per cent unexplained. As a basis for predicting what an individual is going to do or how he is going to feel, this is little better than nothing.

More ironic, however, is the fact that the clues to support for dissent are primarily the student characteristics that most colleges are looking for. What college is going to deny admission to bright children from well-educated families or to students who are likely to go on to graduate school in "intellectual" fields? As other research has shown, these are the characteristics of the dissenters themselves. It seems unlikely that many colleges will cut off their nose to spite their face.

NOTES

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2. John A. Creager, Alexander W. Astin, Robert F. Boruch, Alan E. Bayer, and David E. Drew, National Norms for Entering College Freshmen--Fall 1969, ACE Research Reports, vol. 4, no. 7 (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1969), p. 41.

3. Gallup Poll release, December 18, 1969.

4. Joe L. Spaeth, "Public Reactions to College Student Protests," Sociology of Education, 42 (Spring, 1969), 199-206.

5. Richard Flacks, "The Liberated Generation: An Exploration of the Roots of Student Protest," Journal of Social Issues, 23 (July, 1967), 52-75; William A. Watts and David Whittaker, "Profile of a Nonconformist Youth Culture: A Study of the Berkeley Non-Students," Sociology of Education, 41 (Spring, 1968), 178-200.

6. Gamma has the following properties. If you are asked to predict the rank of a set of responses and are given no further information, you can do no better than guess. If, for every pair of cases that differ with regard to attribute A ($A<B$ or $A>B$), you are told that one member is higher or lower on B than the other, you may be able to use your knowledge of the B-state of the cases to predict their A-state. Gamma is a direct measure of the extent to which knowledge of B improves prediction of A. If B is irrelevant, you can still do no better than guess, and gamma will be 0. If the rank of B directly corresponds to that of A, prediction is improved 100 per cent, and gamma will be 1.00. If B and A are perfectly inversely related, gamma will be -1.00. For further details, see Leo A. Goodman and William H. Kruskal, "Measures of Association for Cross Classification," Journal of the American Statistical Association, 49 (December, 1954), 732-764.

7. See Louis L. McQuitty, "Elementary Factor Analysis," Psychological Reports, 9 (1961), 71-78.

8. "Selectivity" basically taps an institution's ability to enroll the brighter students it has admitted and corresponds to the average intellectual ability of its freshman class. See Alexander W. Astin, Who Goes Where to College? (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1965), p. 55.

9. Institutional data on student protests were kindly provided by Richard E. Peterson of the Educational Testing Service.

TABLE 1

ATTITUDES OF ALUMNI TOWARD MILITANCY

(Per Cent)

Statement	Support for Militancy
The protests of college students are a healthy sign for America . . . . . (Agree)	51
This country would be better off if there were less protest and dissatisfaction coming from college campuses . . . . . (Disagree)	48
College students should lose their draft deferments for participating in demonstrations against the draft . . . . . (Disagree)	58
In the long run, current protests of Negroes in the cities will be healthy for America . . . . (Agree)	44
Negro militancy is needlessly dividing American society into conflicting camps . . . . . (Disagree)	33
The main cause of Negro riots in the cities is white racism . . . . . (Agree)	36

TABLE 2

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN INDEPENDENT VARIABLES AND SUPPORT FOR MILITANCY

(Pearson r)

Independent Variable	r
Parental family income[a]	.09
Father's education[b]	.16
Size of hometown	.13
Original religion (Jewish)	.14
Own age	-.16
College quality[c]	.23
College grades[d]	.17
Graduate enrollment	.24

[a] In hundreds of dollars.

[b] In years.

[c] Astin's "selectivity."

[d] A+ and A = 9, A- = 8, C- = 2, D+ or lower = 1.

[e] Number of years (full-time equivalents) enrolled in graduate school between 1961 and 1968.

TABLE 3

SUPPORT FOR MILITANCY BY CAREER FIELD

(Per Cent in Top Quartile)

Career Field	Career Field	
	Senior (1961)	1968
Humanities	54	62
Social sciences	47	54
Law	47	48
Physical sciences	31	36
Other professions	36	35
Medicine	34	33
Biological sciences	33	33
Education	24	24
Business	17	15
Engineering	16	14
Other health	9	11

TABLE 4

SUPPORT FOR MILITANCY BY AGE AND COLLEGE QUALITY

(Per Cent in Top Quartile)

College Quality	Age		
	28 or Younger	29-31	Over 31
High	44 (1,208)	35 (737)	28 (158)
Medium	30 (1,151)	23 (879)	21 (304)
Low	23 (1,366)	16 (1,097)	10 (661)

TABLE 5

APPROPRIATE STANDARDIZED PARTIAL REGRESSION WEIGHTS (Beta) AND COEFFICIENTS OF DETERMINATION (R^2) OF VARIABLES INFLUENCING SUPPORT FOR MILITANCY

Variable	Beta	R^2	Increment in R^2	R
Father's education	.13			
Parental family income . . .	-.02			
Original religion (Jewish) .	.11			
Size of hometown	.07			
Age	-.12	.06	.06	.25
College quality	.18	.09	.03	.30
College grades	.16	.11	.02	.33
Graduate enrollment	.17	.14	.03	.37
Senior (1961) career field .	-	.16	.02	.40
1968 career field	-	.18	.02	.42